Post-War Partners in Archaeology: The Bureau of Reclamation , the National Park Service, and the River Basin Surveys in the Missouri River Basin (1945-1969)

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Abstract

The Interagency Archaeological Salvage Program began more than 50 years ago as an "emergency" program of archaeological reconnaissance, testing, excavation, and salvage in response to the nation's initiative to develop water resources in the Western United States. This tremendous public works program focused in river valleys where many significant archaeological resources were known and postulated to exist. This article looks at the Interagency Archaeological Salvage Program highlighting the relationship between the Smithsonian Institution, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Reclamation in the Missouri River Basin. We discuss some of the contributions to the profession resulting from "salvage" projects conducted on Reclamation lands.

INTRODUCTION

In his comprehensive review of Middle Missouri Archaeology, published in 1971 shortly after the closing of the River Basin Surveys office in Linconln, Nebraska, which signaled the end of large scale survey and excavation along the Missouri River Valley, Don Lehmer (1971:1) began:

> "The year 1945 saw American archeology facing a major crisis. The Japanese surrender in August marked the end of World War II, and it was the signal for the United States to begin its transition back to a peace-time status. As part of the transition, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Corps of Engineers moved to activate plans for the construction of a vast reservoir system throughout the country. Well before the war ended, it was obvious that the building of the dams and the filling of the reservoirs would result in an unparalleled destruction of archaeological materials."

The Flood Control Act of December 22, 1944 authorized dam construction on a massive scale throughout the nation (Thiessen 1994:15). This act established The Pick-Sloan Missouri

Basin Program which would impact the states of Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The planned and subsequently realized objectives of this massive water control program were flood control, aids to navigation, power generation, conservation and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat, creation of recreational opportunities, and potential irrigation water for over 3 million acres of previously unirrigated land (U.S. Department of the Interior 1981).

The downside of this massive public works program was that at least 80 percent of the archaeological remains in the United States occurred along the banks of rivers and creeks (Strong et al 1945; Wedel 1947:7). Wedel, writing in 1947, stated that,

> "In the Missouri River Basin, it is already evident that the townsites, camp grounds, burial places, pictographs, and other aboriginal remains occur mostly in stream valleys near potable water . . . Scores of large townsites . . . lie along the mainstem of the Missouri . . . (Wedel 1947: 7).

In addition, prior experience gained through attempts at archaeological salvage in association with programs such as the WPA and CWA, led the archaeological community to seek ways in which to prevent some of the problems encountered with these large scale work projects. These problems included inadequate funding for archaeological salvage, lack of central direction, insufficient numbers of trained supervisory archaeological personnel, publication lags, and the scattering and even loss of the resultant collections and data (Guthe 1952; Thiessen 1999:8). Given the fact that the objective of the work relief programs was to reduce unemployment and not to stimulate archeological research, it was not surprising that the results of these "make-work" archaeological projects were not entirely satisfactory to the discipline of archeology (Thiessen 1999:6).

BUREAUCRACY AND PLANNING

In May 1944, during the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), a Planning Committee of concerned archaeologists was formed to review the past results and problems of WPA archaeological work. This committee, along with the earlier "Committee on Basic Needs in Archaeology," formed in 1939 by the National Research Council, eventually reported back to the SAA. Their report offered several recommendations for future federally-sponsored archaeological programs including : 1) that a "guiding force" should be established to provide central direction to the effort; 2) the professional personnel engaged in such programs should not be burdened with administrative responsibilities, but rather should remain free to concentrate their attention on archaeological matters; properly qualified organizations and personnel should be selected; and 4) analysis and reporting of research should be completed for each project begun" (Thiessen 1999:11-12). Based on this report, the Committee for the Recovery of Archaeological Remains (CRAR) was established and held it's first meeting in May 1945.

The CRAR consisted of representatives from the SAA (Fredrick Johnson), the American Anthropological Association (J.O. Brew), the American Council for Learned Societies (A.V. Kidder and W.S. Wells), the Bureau of American Ethnology (Frank H. H. Roberts), and National Research Council's Committee on Basic Needs of American Archaeology (W.D. Strong). The CRAR was to provide explicit guidance to the reservoir construction program salvage efforts, becoming the "guiding force" recommended by the Planning Committee for future federal archaeological programs. The CRAR also proved to be very effective in lobbying for widespread popular and governmental support for the federal salvage program (Thiessen 1999:14).

The Federal government's response to this call for action was the establishment of the Interagency Archeological and Paleontological Salvage Program, later shortened to the Interagency Archeological Salvage Program (IASP). Created in the late summer and early fall of 1945, the IASP was a multi-agency, cooperative program designed to inventory and assess the importance of archaeological resources in planned reservoir areas, and to preserve a portion of the archaeological record in those reservoir areas by conducting excavations at selected sites.

Participating organizations were the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the Corps of Engineers (Corps) as the nations' foremost dam-building agencies; the Smithsonian Institution (SI) as the scientific research arm of the federal government; the National Park Service (NPS) as the federal bureau with legislatively-mandated responsibility for surveying the nation's federally owned archaeological and historical resources, and the CRAR as the principal advisory spokes group for the archeological profession. State or local universities, historical societies, and museums also participated as cooperating organizations, doing survey and excavation. Needless to say, a complex set of interrelationships developed between these entities (Thiessen 1999)!

In 1945, a Memorandum of Understanding between the NPS and the SI formally initiated the IASP and defined the relationship between the two groups. The SI established the River Basin Surveys (RBS) program to carry out archaeological survey and salvage projects throughout the country. The SI, through the RBS program, assumed responsibility for field investigations, provided technical supervision and personnel, and served as liaison with the NPS in planning and programming. The NPS served as liaison between the various participating agencies, and was responsible for overall program planning, funding, and administration. State and local institutions provided space for field offices and laboratories, advice and assistance through institutional staff,

and in some cases operated as independent cooperating organizations, carrying out their own survey and salvage projects.

The role of Reclamation and the Corps was, of course, to plan and implement their water control programs of dam-building and reservoir construction, and in addition, to share their water resource development plans with the NPS and RBS. In the earliest stages of the IASP, Reclamation, and the Corps also provided funds for archaeological salvage work. In 1946 and 1947, Reclamation transferred to the NPS a total of $60,000 to fund salvage investigations at Reclamation and Corps projects in the Missouri River Basin (Thiessen 1999). Additional funds were also transferred for salvage work outside the Missouri basin. However, the Bureau of the Budget ruled late in 1947 that Reclamation and the Corps lacked statutory authority to expend their funds for archeological purposes. From that point on, the NPS sought an annual salvage appropriation from Congress under the authority of the Historic Sites Act of 1935. Reclamation and the Corps, of course, continued to share their water resource development plans so that archeological salvage investigations could be coordinated with them. On-site Reclamation and Corps project personnel often provided local information and services to facilitate the work of the salvage researchers.

THE WORK

From 1946 through 1967, over $9,000,000 was expended on contracted and the IASP sponsored field investigations in prospective reservoir areas throughout the United States (Smithsonian Institution 1968:42). During these years, regional offices were established in Eugene, Oregon; Austin, Texas; Berkeley, California; and Lincoln, Nebraska. Surveys in more

than 500 reservoir areas in 43 states led to the location of an estimated 20,000 sites (Brew 1968:3). Following survey, over 500 major excavations were conducted to further document significant prehistoric and historic archeological sites prior to inundation. Despite chronic problems with analysis and reporting subsequent to field work, a 1968 bibliography of works resulting directly from this program (Petsche 1968) lists more than 2600 published and unpublished reports and manuscripts which were the immediate result of the IASP projects.

THE MISSOURI RIVER BASIN PROJECT

The Missouri River Basin (MRB) was the locus of the first IASP work. The project office, formally known as the Missouri Basin Project or MBP, in Lincoln, Nebraska was also the largest and longest living of the field offices. The MBP existed for nearly 23 years, during which time it was a major focus of RBS program activities. Waldo R. Wedel was its first director, and employment on MBP field projects trained dozens if not hundreds of students in archaeological field and laboratory research techniques. Many students, some of whom are well known to us, went on to pursue advanced degrees in anthropology and developed professional archaeological careers.

During it's lifespan, the MBP gathered massive amounts of data on the prehistoric and historic archeological resources along the Missouri River and tributary streams, even as dam closure and reservoir flooding began to inundate the very resources being studied. Petsche's 1968 bibliography, contains 898 entries for states which border the Missouri River, or 34.5 % of all reports listed. Of the two series published by the RBS, 26 of 39 *River Basin Surveys Papers* described MBP investigations and 10 of the 13 *Publications in Salvage Archeology* reported the

results of MBP research. Lehmer noted that, as a result of IASP over 800 sites were recorded in the Missouri River Valley, and it has been estimated that more than 1.5 million archaeological artifacts and specimens were cataloged in the MBP headquarters alone. Moreover, work continues to the present through reservoir shoreline monitoring, and continued stabilization and salvage under the direct auspices of Reclamation and the Corps on lands they respectively administer.

The IASP also produced a number of timeless scholarly syntheses, several of which were noted by Jennings (1985) in his review of the RBS, including Wedel's (1961) masterful summary of Plains prehistory from Paleo-Indian to historic time; Lehmer's (1971) ordering of data from scores of newly dug sites to document and describe the Middle Missouri Tradition; and Wood's (1964) monograph on the Huff site and the prehistoric Mandan.

Notable investigations associated with Reclamation projects included the Medicine Creek work of Marvin Kivett, J.M. Shippee, and George Metcalf (1997); Wheeler's (1963) Stutsman Focus research in the Jamestown Reservoir area; Husted's (1969) Yellowtail Dam and Bighorn Canyon research; Neuman's (1963) research in the Lovewell Reservoir area; Miller's (1963) work at the Tiber Reservoir, Montana; Coopers (1958) work at the Heart Butte Reservoir area; and Wheeler's (1957) classic studies of the Angostura, Keyhole, and Boysen reservoirs. The last, Wheeler's study, has recently been published, with the financial support of Reclamation (Wheeler 1995, 1996, and 1997). Additional Reclamation projects, including investigations in the Heart Butte, Lonetree, and Boysen reservoirs, have also been recently summarized in "40 Something: The River Basin Surveys"(Banks, ed. 1994), also subsidized by Reclamation.

In 1969, as the result of a decrease in new reservoir construction, the RBS program was officially dissolved, and responsibility for administering the work of the program transferred to participating entities such as the Midwest Archaeological Center of the National Park Service. The NPS - Midwest Archaeological Center continued to carry out the in the Missouri Basin until the passage of the Moss-Bennett legislation in 1974. This work included several projects in Reclamation project areas, funded with money transferred to the Center by Reclamation (Thiessen, personal communication 1998). The Archaeological and Historical Preservation Act of 1974 authorized all Federal agencies to expend funds for archaeological investigations in connection with projects undertaken by them, which effectively removed the 1947 Bureau of the Budget ruling. Consequently, many Federal land-managing agencies acquired archaeologists and other cultural resource specialists to help administer these responsibilities. Reclamation was one of the first to respond to this expanded authority, and soon administered many archaeological investigations under the guidance of Senior Bureau Archaeologist Ward F. Weakly, who was hired for that purpose in 1975 (Logan 1968). But that is another story . . .

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Methodological advances instituted by the IASP include: the trinomial site numbering system, originally adapted from the Nebraska WPA archaeological program; the use of airplane reconnaissance and photography to locate and document sites and locations; and the use of heavy earthmoving equipment to remove overburden from sites prior to excavation. The early use of these methodologies is amply illustrated by Bureau of Reclamation work in the Medicine Creek Reservoir.

A positive and practical aspect of the program was a permanent central laboratory where analysis, identifications, photography, and drafting were continuously carried out. (Jennings 1985:293). In addition, a consistent set of field methods and recording procedures and formats were developed and instituted for field and laboratory operations. Standardized multilithed field and laboratory forms, served to insure adequate documentation and context for recovered survey and excavation data, as well as the vast body of artifactual materials produced by the program. The completed forms were copied in triplicate and filed in both regional offices and the SI, a further hedge against information loss. Further standardization was provided by the "Handbook for Basic Archeological Specimen Processing", developed by Dean Clark in the Lincoln Regional field laboratory. Even today, those of us who work with RBS collections can immediately recognize these artifacts by the hand of the labeler, and consistent method of cataloging and labeling. And, we can surely recognize an original RBS storage container be it cigar box, match box, typewriter ribbon case, mason jar, tobacco tin, candy box, Quaker Oats box, coffee can, or explosive detonator tin!

Cultural Resource Management archaeology had it's beginnings in the IASP with its innovative and enduring multi- disciplinary and multi-agency approach. Perhaps most importantly, the recruiting and coordination of multi-disciplinary teams of archaeologists, paleontologists, historians, and hydrologic engineers for the salvage of archaeological resources in the face of immediate inundation and destruction served as a model for what later became the field of conservation archaeology.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CONTINUING PROMISES

Despite the many positive influences of the IASP it was unable to avoid many of those problems noted earlier. Without doubt, one of the most immediate and continuing problems facing archaeologists and agencies is the progressive destruction of archaeological sites and environs along the waterways. Shoreline fluctuations and bank destabilization continue to take a heavy toll on these resources. And, once exposed, the work of professional and amateur looters assures even more rapid destruction and degradation.

For repository institutions, the scattering of collections and loss of data is a second "most important problem" faced by contemporary and future archaeologists and researchers. While a central laboratory was established in Lincoln for the initial processing of archeological collections, these collections were never gathered into a single repository. Over the years, the IASP collections have suffered from inadequate facilities. Overcrowded storage, lack of inventory control, and poor curatorial oversight have potentially damaged the research value of many IASP artifacts and associated documents. Many federal agencies and professional societies currently are working to generate standards, guidelines, and policies for the curation of such archaeological collections and are seeking methods to correct the problems.

Today, the archaeological collections generated by the IASP are housed and curated in various repositories nationwide including the SI. However, much to the frustration of researchers interested in previous work done in a locale or region, there is no convenient or ready way to ascertain the existence, the extent, or location of particular collections. An invaluable tool to present-day and future researchers would be an automated index that described in useful detail the location and content of the scattered IASP collections and records. If maintained online and

interactive, this database could also be used to identify loaned collections and associated sets of records. By such a means, interested researchers could easily identify and evaluate collections and record sets needed for analytical purposes (Scott 1995). Such a database could also serve as a bibliographic resource for current publications, delivered papers and research reports based on the IASP or related materials. As such, it would encompass and serve as a contemporary upgrade of Petsche's 1968 bibliography, a commendable goal in itself.

Commenting on the importance of an interactive database, Dr. Edward B. Jelks (1995), an RBS pioneer, stated that,

> " Archeological field and analytical methods in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s were primitive in some respects when compared to more advanced methods in common use today. There is much to be learned about past cultures by reinterpreting RBS data through the use of more modern techniques and methods . . . The heavy investment of the federal government -- and of many universities and museums - - in collecting these specimens and data should be protected by the implementation of a program to ensure that the RBS specimens and records are preserved, inventoried, and made available for future study by students and scholars."

The IASP began modestly, but with such promise in 1945. In less than 30 years it produced, through the cooperation of a multitude of people and agencies, an unmatched and irreplaceable heritage of archaeological practice and material data. Perhaps it is once again time for concerned archaeologists to attempt another multi-agency effort in order to develop a unified program to ensure that IASP data -- so painstakingly collected -- continue to be available for future use.

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